

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A self-adjusting side guide for a document-handling machine having a feed deck along which documents are transported comprising:
 - a first member mounted for movement along the feed deck toward and away from the documents;
 - a guide wall mechanism operatively connected to the first member for movement relative to the first member; and
 - a biasing device that applies a biasing force that biases the guide wall into a first position relative to the first member;wherein at times when an external force sufficient to move the first member along the feed deck in the direction of the documents is applied to the guide wall mechanism, the guide wall mechanism moves toward the documents against the biasing force from the first position to a second position relative to the first member without any movement of the first member toward the documents.
2. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 1, wherein at times when the guide wall mechanism is in the second position and the external force continues to be applied the guide wall mechanism and the first member move together toward the documents.
3. A self-adjusting side-guide as recited in claim 2, wherein at times when the guide wall mechanism and the first member are being moved together by the external force and the external force is subsequently removed the first member becomes stationary relative to the feed deck and the guide wall mechanism is returned to the first position by the biasing device.

4. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 3, wherein a distance between the first and second positions is between about .010 inches to .020 inches.

5. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 4, wherein the biasing device includes at least one spring disposed between the guide wall mechanism and the first member.

6. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 4, wherein the guide wall mechanism includes a channel therein that divides the guide wall mechanism into a guide wall and a rear housing and the first member extends into the channel.

7. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 5, wherein the biasing device is at least one spring disposed between the rear housing and the first member.

8. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 7, wherein the rear housing has a cavity within which the at least one spring is disposed.

9. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 6, wherein when the guide wall mechanism is in the first position the guide wall abuts against the first member and when the guide wall is in the second position the guide wall abuts against the rear housing.

10. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 9, where the first member is an L-shaped rail having a first leg horizontal to the feed deck and a second leg orthogonal to the first leg, the second leg extending into the channel.

11. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 3, wherein the biasing device is first and second springs each disposed between the guide wall mechanism and the first member.

12. A self-adjusting guide as recited in claim 11, wherein the guide wall mechanism includes a channel therein that divides the guide wall mechanism into a guide wall and a rear housing and the first member extends into the channel.

13. A self-adjusting side guide as recited in claim 12, wherein the rear housing has first and second cavities within which the first and second springs are respectively disposed.

14. A method for registering documents on a feed deck against a registration wall comprising the steps of:

providing a side guide having a first member mounted for movement along the feed deck toward and away from the documents, a guide wall mechanism operatively connected to the first member for movement relative to the first member; and a biasing device that applies a biasing force that biases the guide wall into a first position relative to the first member;

applying a force to the guide wall mechanism that moves the guide wall mechanism against the biasing force toward the documents from the first position and into a second position relative to the first member without a corresponding movement of the first member toward the documents;

continuing to apply the force to the guide wall at the second position so that the first member and the guide wall move together toward the registration wall contacting the documents and registering the documents against the registration wall; and

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removing the force from the guide wall when the documents are registered thereby permitting the biasing device to move the guide wall mechanism from the second position to the first position creating a gap between the documents and the guide wall.

15. A method as recited in claim 11, wherein the gap is created to be in a range of about .010 inches to .020 inches.